Plasmodium falciparum. Encouraged by the results in the preliminary studies, DRDO is currently undertaking advanced research with the plant *i.e.* isolation and characterization of the active compound which is expected to improve the efficacy against Malaria.

Hike in sugar price

*17. SHRI VIJAY JAWAHARLAL DARDA:
DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY:

Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether with no firmed up figure available yet on the estimated shortfall in sugarcane output this season and sugar prices shooting up, Ministry is moving to seek permission of Government of importing raw-sugar;

(b) if so, whether Ministry plans to take permission to allow mills to import raw sugar;

(c) whether the duty is expected to fall due to low acreage of the crop followed by erratic weather conditions especially in Maharashtra, Karnataka and parts of U.P.;

(d) whether prices have already risen in retail markets to Rs 21 per kg. from Rs.17 per kg. corresponding last year; and

(e) if so, whether any final decision has been taken?

THE MINISTER OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI SHARAD PAWAR): (a) to (e) As per the first advance estimates released by the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation, the sugarcane production in the current sugar season 2008-09 is estimated to be 2946 lac tons as against production of 3405 lac tons (fourth advance estimates) in the last sugar season 2007-08. The lower production of sugarcane is mainly due to reported shortfall in both acreage as well as productivity on account of delay and deficiency of rains in the south and unseasonal rains elsewhere. Also, there has been a greater diversion of sugarcane to gur and khandsari units. This has led to an increasing trend in sugar prices during the current sugar season 2008-09.

The retail prices of sugar have been in the range of Rs. 18 to Rs. 24.50 per kilogram during the period December, 2008 to January, 2009 as compared to the range of Rs.14 to Rs. 20 per kilogram prevalent correspondingly during December, 2007 to January, 2008 in various centres of the country.

In order to increase availability of sugar in the country, the Government has allowed sugar mills to import raw sugar under Advance Authorization 'Scheme up to 30.09.2009 and permitted sugar factories to sell processed raw sugar in the domestic market and fulfill export obligation on 'ton-to-ton' basis within 24 months.

The Government is continuously monitoring the situation to ensure adequate availability of sugar in the country.